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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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SUBJECT: Syria/Iraq, Syria/Palestinians, Syria/Israel, Lebanon,
Bush's Strategy in Iraq, US/Israel (8/20-21)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on August 21 reported the visit to Damascus by Iraqi PM Nouri al-Malki and his meeting with PM Mohammad Naji Ottri on August 20. Talks focused on bilateral relations and mutual cooperation between the two countries and means to improve them. PM Ottri expressed Syria's readiness to offer support and aid to the Iraqi people, participate effectively in rebuilding Iraq and construct what has been destroyed by war. "Syria spared no effort to offer aid to Iraqis, and did her best to support and realize Iraqi national reconciliation, security and stability," Ottri said. He held the occupation forces responsible for the deteriorating social, economic and security situation there, saying "the presence of occupation forces in Iraq attracted extremist powers and led to escalating blind violence which claims the lives of scores of innocent people every day in Iraq." "Putting a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq will boost opportunities of reconciliation among Iraqis and provide suitable atmosphere for a serious dialogue among different Iraqi parties," PM Ottri went on. Iraqi PM al-Maliki reiterated the importance of re-evaluating all former agreements between the two states through a joint technical commission. Members of the Iraqi delegation expressed appreciation of Syria for providing suitable conditions to Iraqi refugees in Syria.

Independent al-Watan on 8/20 featured a message addressed by Ismail Hanieh, PM of the PA caretaker government, to President Asad calling on him to help in solving the ordeal of Palestinian refugees fleeing persecution in Iraq and trapped at its common borders with Syria. Hanieh hailed President Asad's positions regarding the Palestine cause and his "incessant effort in service of the Palestinian people". The premier then hoped that Assad would personally intervene to end those refugees' tragic conditions and to allow them to live in Syria, explaining that such a step would be a mere extension of the president's national measures in support of Pan-Arab causes. Hanieh appealed to Asad to personally follow up on the issue by appointing a special envoy for this purpose.

All papers on August 21 featured a call on Israel by the "Reporters without Borders" Organization on August 20 to release Syrian Journalist and TV correspondent in the Occupied Syrian Golan Ata Farhat. "Israeli authorities have not given any justification

regarding the arrest of Farhat who doesn't know the accusations directed against him," Italian AKI news agency quoted the Organization as saying. Israeli occupation forces on July 30th stormed Farhat's home in Bakata, north of the occupied Syrian Golan, taking him to unknown place after searching his house.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Syrian and Iraqi talks tackle mutual cooperation, reactivation of past agreements, and the issue of Iraqi refugees. Ottri: We are grieved by Iraqi suffering; we support any effort contributing to national reconciliation. Al-Maliki: We are keen on enhancing relations to serve joint interests. The Iraqi side expresses appreciation for Syria's efforts toward Iraqi refugees confirming concern to create a suitable atmosphere for their return" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/21)

"General Petraeus [Commander of Multi-National Force in Iraq] and Ambassador Crocker submit their report on Iraq on September 11. A Pentagon official: Bush, the loser, prepares to announce his failure in front of the public opinion" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/21)

"British Newspaper "The Guardian: Smell of failure hovers over the White House" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/21)

"Anti-occupation demonstration in Sadr city. News circulated about a visit to Baghdad by Iranian President Ahmadinejad. French Foreign Minister Kouchner hints at a French role in Iraq in the future" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/21)

"French Foreign Minister Kouchner suddenly in Baghdad to express solidarity with Iraqis. A military adviser to Bush: British forces will be forced to a horrendous and embarrassing withdrawal from

Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/20)

"Hanieh addresses a message to President Asad about the suffering of Palestinian refugees coming from Iraq" (Independent al-Watan, 8/20)

"Palestinian refugees in Syria: Responding to Syria's call for dialogue is necessary" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/20)

"Amid continuing darkness in Gaza, six Palestinians martyred in an Israeli air strike" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/21)

"A new video tape exposes Israeli humiliation of Palestinians on border crossings. Palestinians worry about nuclear leakage from the Demona reactor" (Independent al-Watan, 8/20)

"Israeli occupation denies stopping to chase Palestinian activists in the West Bank. The occupation suspends providing the Gaza Strip with fuel and electricity" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/20)

"Confrontations in Nahr al-Bared enter the fourth month. The Opposition studies all possibilities with President Lahoud and Speaker Berri" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/21)

"The Lebanese crisis... between independent resolution and US accounts. Lebanese Ministers and MPs: The governing team's betting on foreign powers sabotages the country" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/20)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"The House of Arabism"

Abd-al-Fattah Awad, Chief Editor of government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/21): "Damascus receives Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki while it is aware of the amount of pain the Iraqi people are suffering and of the magnitude of the complications the situation in sisterly Iraq is witnessing.

"With this realization of the tragedies Iraq is experiencing, Syria believes that there is no option other than political reconciliation, which constitutes the foundation stone on which the other solutions can be built. It also fully believes that occupation is the essence of the problem and that setting a timetable for the withdrawal of the occupation from Iraq would be the main step in the right direction....

"The agenda of the Iraqi brothers here will be rich with frank discussions, reflecting the fact that Damascus is always the beautiful house of Arabism, the house that believed in the sanctity of Arab affiliation....

"This is why Syrians are now grieved by this Arab rift, which we see in various forms, the most prominent of which, perhaps, is our excessive sensitivity toward one another and the great deal of tension in which we deal with what is said here or there.

"It is obvious that there is a very pressing need now for sincere Arab efforts to put Arab solidarity on its right track. Although Arab countries have many interests in common, we see the opposite. And at the same time we do not see sufficient Arab efforts to mend the Arab home from the weakness it suffered and the differences that turned--thanks to certain parties--into useless shouting...!

"Syria's message to all Arab countries is that what brings us together is greater than what drives us apart, that we have common interests and hopes, and that departure from Arabism promises of nothing but destruction."

"Disastrous Strategy"

Muhammad Khair al-Jammali, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/21): "Indications of failure of Bush's new strategy in Iraq came not only from the increasing number of deaths among US troops in Iraq, or from the rise in suicide cases among the American soldiers, as recently announced, or from the failure of the military campaigns, which were often crowned by war crimes against the Iraqi people, but also from the White House announcement that plans are being made for a gradual pullout of the troops from Iraq in what will be presented as a new strategy....

"Will the White House's new strategy succeed in containing failure in Iraq and its political repercussions, which threaten the future of the Republicans in the next presidential election...?

"This strategy might succeed only if the American policy that neoconservatives are pursuing is changed in favor of a new policy abandoning the logic of force and interference in the internal affairs of other countries and the tendency for arrogance, threats, and creation of chaos and sedition, and adopting dialogue as the only language to solve problems of the region and present an acceptable image of the United States in the region and the rest of the world."

"Withdrawal, Most Useful US Option in Iraq"

Ahmad Dawwa, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/21): "It is likely that the US Administration will withdraw US troops from Iraq in light of the growing domestic and foreign pressure and the fact that the victory Bush is talking about will not be achieved before or after the end of his term in office....

"The United States will certainly not withdraw from Iraq because it accomplished its mission. Nor will it withdraw in response to the demands of the Iraqi people and the American and world public or to please Arabs. It will withdraw because the Bush administration has come to realize that the mission was not and will not be accomplished in the way Bush wanted...."

"Before It Is Too Late"

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, "The United States is providing Israel with additional military aid while Tel Aviv is not only rejecting the peace of the international legitimacy, but also directing threats around the clock and holding military exercises in preparation for a new round of wars....

"Washington is pushing Israel toward a military adventure to regain some of the prestige it lost after the defeat it suffered at the hands of the Lebanese national resistance last year....

"Arabs, therefore, need to be aware of what they are doing in their American relations. If they like divisions and do not want solidarity, they have no excuse whatsoever to get closer to the current US Administration and to cover its positions. As for Syria, it knows exactly what it wants. It has sufficient experience and ability to confront all eventualities. We hope that all Arab brothers will work to revive Arab solidarity and be alert to the dangers of this stage before it is too late."

Corbin